Perfection as Participation: An Ontological Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines whether perfection, understood ontologically rather than morally, can be coherently present in imperfect beings without presupposing theological premises. Perfection is defined as ontological self-sufficiency, while imperfection denotes ontological dependence. On these minimal definitions, it is shown that an imperfect being cannot render itself perfect without contradiction: dependence cannot generate self-sufficiency, and no process of development, emergence, or optimization can bridge this categorical divide.

From this negative result, the paper derives a modal constraint: if perfection is present in imperfect beings at all, it must be received rather than achieved. The analysis then determines the only coherent mode of such reception. Perfection cannot be produced by the imperfect, nor transferred without loss or division. The sole viable account is participation, understood as real possession without self-grounding and without depletion of the source.

The paper further demonstrates that participation necessarily entails an asymmetrical relation of dependence without identity. This relation is ontological rather than psychological and does not require reciprocity, consciousness, or agency. The role of intentionality is therefore examined and shown to be sufficient but not logically necessary for the giving of perfection, leaving both intentional and impersonal accounts admissible within the established constraints.

The argument is developed entirely without appeal to theological doctrine or revealed claims and is supplemented by a formal appendix presenting the core results in natural-deduction and modal-logical form. The paper's contribution lies in clarifying the logical conditions under which perfection could be present in imperfect beings and in delimiting the range of coherent explanatory accounts available to further metaphysical, scientific, or theological inquiry.

1. Introduction

Philosophical inquiry has long distinguished between modes of being that are complete in themselves and those that exist dependently, contingently, or incompletely. While this distinction has often been expressed through moral, theological, or evaluative language, its core is ontological rather than normative. This paper revisits the distinction using the terms *perfect* and *imperfect*, not as judgments of value, but as descriptors of existential structure.

In the present analysis, *perfection* is understood as ontological sufficiency: that which lacks nothing required for its own existence. *Imperfection*, by contrast, refers to any mode of being whose existence depends upon conditions beyond itself. These definitions are deliberately minimal. They do not assume moral goodness, maximal power, or theological commitments, nor do they presuppose that perfection is instantiated. Instead, they function as structural categories necessary for examining dependence, causation, and participation.

The central question motivating this paper is not whether perfection exists in an absolute sense, but whether perfection—if present in imperfect beings at all—can be coherently accounted for. Human experience routinely invokes notions of fulfillment, completion, truth, goodness, or coherence that appear to exceed purely instrumental or contingent explanation. Philosophical accounts frequently oscillate between treating such notions as regulative ideals, emergent properties, or mere linguistic conveniences. This paper argues that these approaches fail to address a more fundamental issue: whether imperfection can generate perfection, or whether perfection must be received from beyond the limits of imperfect existence.

The analysis begins by establishing a negative result: an imperfect being cannot make itself perfect without contradiction. Self-sufficiency cannot arise from dependence, and completeness cannot be achieved by that which lacks the sufficient conditions for its own being. This result does not deny the possibility of development, improvement, or optimization within imperfect systems. Rather, it distinguishes such processes from perfection proper, which concerns the grounding of existence itself rather than degrees of functional adequacy.

From this negative result follows a modal constraint that structures the remainder of the paper: if perfection is present in the imperfect at all, it must be received rather than achieved. This claim is not offered as a metaphysical doctrine but as a conditional necessity. It does not assert that perfection exists, nor that it is universally present, but only that its presence—should it occur—cannot be explained by self-generation within imperfect beings.

The paper then examines what it could mean, in strictly metaphysical terms, for perfection to be “given.” Giving is not understood as transfer, division, or loss, but as participation: a mode of reception in which the source of perfection remains perfect while the recipient truly shares in what it does not possess intrinsically. This distinction allows for a coherent account of received perfection without collapsing the difference between perfect and imperfect modes of being.

Subsequent sections address whether such participation requires intentionality or agency, whether participation necessarily implies relation, and whether perfection can be given impersonally. These questions are treated sequentially and without presupposition. Intentionality is shown to be sufficient but not logically necessary for participation, allowing both intentional and impersonal accounts to be evaluated on their own merits. Relation is argued to be unavoidable wherever participation occurs, though relation alone does not entail consciousness or personality.

By proceeding in this manner, the paper aims to clarify the conceptual terrain surrounding perfection, dependence, and participation while avoiding appeals to theological authority or revealed premises. Its purpose is not to resolve all questions concerning the source of perfection, but to establish which accounts remain logically viable once self-generation is excluded. In doing so, it seeks to provide a philosophically unassailable framework within which further inquiry—metaphysical, scientific, or theological—may proceed without confusion or equivocation.

2. Definitions and Terminology

This paper employs a limited set of terms whose meanings are fixed for the purposes of the argument. Several of these terms carry significant historical and colloquial baggage. Accordingly, they are defined here in a deliberately minimal and ontological sense, independent of moral, theological, or psychological connotations.

2.1 Perfection

Perfection is defined as **ontological sufficiency**: the condition of lacking nothing required for one's own existence. A perfect being, in this sense, is not dependent upon external conditions, causes, or sustaining factors in order to be what it is. Perfection, as used here, refers to completeness of being rather than maximality of properties.

This definition does **not** imply:

- Moral goodness
- Omnipotence or omniscience
- Consciousness or personality
- Actual instantiation

Nor does it assume that perfection admits of degrees. Perfection, so defined, is a categorical mode of being rather than a quantitative measure.

2.2 Imperfection

Imperfection denotes any mode of existence that is **ontologically dependent**. An imperfect being exists by virtue of conditions beyond itself and lacks self-sufficiency with respect to its existence or persistence. Imperfection is therefore not a defect or failure, but a structural feature of contingent being.

An imperfect being may be:

- Fully functional
- Highly developed
- Optimized relative to its nature

Imperfection, as used here, concerns **dependence**, not deficiency. The term does not imply error, corruption, or inadequacy, but only non-self-grounding existence.

2.3 Achievement and Earning

Achievement and *earning* are used interchangeably to denote outcomes whose sufficient causes lie within the agent or system that attains them. An achieved property is one that arises through internal capacities, processes, or efforts, even if external conditions are necessary as enabling factors.

In this paper, to say that perfection is *earned* would mean that the imperfect being already contains, in some latent or potential form, the sufficient basis for ontological self-sufficiency. It is precisely this claim that will be shown to be incoherent.

2.4 Reception and Giving

Reception refers to the presence of a feature or actuality in a being whose sufficient cause lies **outside** that being. To say that something is *given* is not to imply deliberation, benevolence, or intention, but merely that the recipient is not the ultimate source of what is received.

"Giving," in this strictly metaphysical sense, is therefore compatible with both intentional and impersonal accounts. The term functions causally rather than ethically and is used only to mark the asymmetry between source and recipient.

2.5 Participation

Participation denotes a mode of reception in which a being truly possesses a feature without possessing it as its own ground. A participant shares in an actuality that remains fully grounded in its source, without diminishing or dividing that source.

Participation is distinguished from:

- Transfer, which implies loss
- Production, which implies self-generation
- Identity, which collapses distinction

Participation allows for real possession without ontological independence and is therefore essential for preserving the distinction between perfect and imperfect modes of being.

2.6 Relation

Relation is understood minimally as **ontological dependence with distinction**. Where participation occurs, relation necessarily follows: the participant depends upon a source that is not identical with it. Relation, in this sense, does not require reciprocity, consciousness, or agency. It requires only asymmetry and sustained dependence.

2.7 Intentionality

Intentionality refers to directedness of action or causation toward an end. In this paper, intentionality is treated as **sufficient but not necessary** for giving. That is, while intentional agency may account for the communication of perfection, the mere fact of participation does not logically entail intention.

The role of intentionality is therefore left open for evaluation rather than assumed or denied.

Section Summary

For the purposes of this argument:

- *Perfection* means ontological self-sufficiency
- *Imperfection* means ontological dependence

- *Earning* implies internal sufficiency
- *Reception* implies external sufficiency
- *Participation* explains real possession without self-grounding
- *Relation* is unavoidable where participation occurs
- *Intentionality* remains an open, non-presupposed variable

These definitions fix the conceptual framework within which the subsequent arguments proceed and constrain the range of coherent explanations available for perfection in imperfect beings.

Anticipated Objections and Responses

Objection	Formulation	Response
O1: The definition of "perfection" is question-begging	Defining perfection as self-sufficiency already excludes imperfect beings from attaining it.	The definition is stipulative and minimal, not evaluative. The argument does not assume perfection exists or is instantiated; it only examines the coherence conditions under which perfection *could* be present in imperfect beings. Any alternative definition that permits self-generated self-sufficiency would require independent justification.
O2: Improvement or optimization counts as perfection	Sufficiently advanced development could amount to perfection.	Improvement concerns degrees within dependence; perfection concerns the ground of existence itself. Conflating the two commits a category error between functional adequacy and ontological sufficiency.
O3: Emergence explains perfection without external sources	Perfection could emerge from complex systems.	Emergence explains novel properties within a system whose existence is already grounded. It does not explain the transition from dependence to self-grounding. Emergence presupposes an underlying ontological base and therefore cannot generate self-sufficiency.
O4: Latent capacities allow the imperfect to become perfect	Perfection may be potential within the imperfect.	If the sufficient cause of perfection is latent within the imperfect, then the being is not ontologically dependent in the relevant sense. The claim collapses imperfection into disguised perfection and thus changes the definition mid-argument.
O5: The argument relies on outdated metaphysics	Concepts like participation and perfection are pre-modern.	The argument is not historical but structural. Participation is used as a technical term to describe non-rivalrous dependence. No appeal is made to scholastic authorities or doctrines; the concepts are evaluated solely for coherence.

Objection	Formulation	Response
O6: The argument covertly assumes theology	"Perfection" functions as a disguised name for God.	No theological predicates are introduced. The paper does not assert existence, personality, agency, or intentionality. It establishes only modal constraints on how perfection could appear *if* it appears at all.
O7: Dependence does not exclude self-causation	A system could cause itself under certain models.	Self-causation either implies temporal paradox or logical circularity. Causing one's own sufficient conditions requires prior possession of those conditions, negating dependence.
O8: The argument proves too much	If correct, it invalidates all naturalistic accounts.	The argument does not exclude naturalistic explanations of development, emergence, or optimization. It only excludes accounts that claim self-grounding perfection arises wholly from dependent being.
O9: Participation is vague	"Participation" lacks explanatory precision.	Participation is explicitly defined as real possession without self-grounding. It is introduced to avoid the incoherences of transfer, identity, or self-production, not as a metaphorical placeholder.
O10: Intentionality is smuggled in implicitly	"Giving" implies agency.	"Giving" is defined causally, not psychologically. The paper explicitly treats intentionality as sufficient but not necessary, leaving impersonal accounts open for evaluation.

3. The Impossibility of Self-Perfecting Imperfection

This section establishes a negative result that structures the remainder of the paper: an imperfect being cannot render itself perfect without contradiction. The claim is not that imperfect beings cannot change, improve, or develop, but that ontological self-sufficiency cannot arise from ontological dependence.

3.1 Dependence and the Limits of Self-Generation

By definition, an imperfect being is one whose existence depends upon conditions beyond itself. These conditions may include material substrates, causal histories, environmental support, or sustaining processes. Whatever their form, they jointly constitute the sufficient basis for the being's existence.

To claim that such a being could make itself perfect would require that it supply the sufficient conditions for its own existence while already existing dependently. This would entail one of two incoherent positions: either the being already possesses self-sufficiency prior to the alleged transformation, in which case it was never imperfect; or it does not possess self-sufficiency, in which case it lacks the capacity required to generate it.

3.2 Circularity and Self-Grounding

Self-perfecting imperfection requires self-grounding: the capacity to serve as the ultimate explanation of one's own existence. However, self-grounding is precisely what imperfection excludes. A dependent being may act as a partial or instrumental cause within a broader system, but it cannot function as the sufficient cause of its own being without logical circularity.

Any account that appeals to self-organization, recursion, or bootstrapping must still presuppose an ontological base that is not self-generated. Recursive processes explain stability or complexity, not the transition from dependence to independence. The ground of the recursion cannot itself be produced by the recursion without infinite regress or contradiction.

3.3 Potentiality and the Illusion of Latent Perfection

One common response to this difficulty is to posit latent perfection: the claim that imperfection contains within itself the potential to become perfect. Yet potentiality cannot exceed the ontological capacity of that in which it resides. A potential for self-sufficiency would already constitute a form of self-sufficiency in principle.

If perfection were truly latent within imperfection, then the being would not be dependent in the relevant sense. The appeal to latent perfection therefore either collapses the distinction between perfect and imperfect or redefines imperfection as mere incompletion rather than dependence.

3.4 Improvement Versus Perfection

It is essential to distinguish improvement from perfection. Imperfect beings can undergo development, optimization, or refinement relative to their nature. These processes may increase functional adequacy, resilience, or coherence. None of them, however, alters the ontological status of dependence.

Perfection, as defined here, does not admit of degrees. It concerns the grounding of existence, not the quality of performance. No amount of incremental improvement can transform a dependent being into a self-sufficient one, just as no accumulation of effects can replace a sufficient cause.

3.5 The Negative Result

The foregoing analysis yields a strict conclusion: **self-perfecting imperfection is incoherent**. Dependence cannot generate independence, and incompleteness cannot generate ontological sufficiency. This result does not depend on empirical claims, theological assumptions, or contested metaphysical systems. It follows directly from the definitions of dependence and self-sufficiency.

This negative result clears the ground for the paper's central claim. If perfection is present in imperfect beings at all, its sufficient cause cannot lie wholly within those beings. The possibility of perfection therefore requires reception rather than achievement, participation rather than production.

A formal premise–conclusion rendering of this argument is provided in Appendix A.

4. Perfection as Necessarily Received (Modal Constraint)

The negative result established in the preceding section yields a positive constraint on any coherent account of perfection in imperfect beings. If imperfection cannot generate perfection from within itself, then perfection—should it be present at all—must originate beyond the limits of imperfect existence. This section formalizes that constraint and clarifies its modal status.

4.1 From Impossibility to Necessity

The conclusion of Section 3 does not merely deny one possible explanation; it restricts the entire explanatory space. If self-perfecting imperfection is incoherent, then any account that attributes perfection to imperfect beings must locate its sufficient cause externally. This yields the following conditional necessity:

> **If perfection is present in the imperfect, it must be received rather than achieved.**

This statement is modal rather than assertive. It does not claim that perfection exists, nor that it is universally present, but only that its presence admits of no internal explanation consistent with imperfection. The necessity here is logical, not empirical: given the definitions of perfection and imperfection, no alternative mode of acquisition is coherent.

4.2 The Structure of Reception

Reception, as used here, must be sharply distinguished from both production and transfer. Production implies that the recipient is the sufficient cause of what is produced. Transfer implies that what is given is lost or diminished in the source. Neither model is adequate to account for perfection.

Perfection, by definition, cannot be diminished without ceasing to be perfection. Nor can it be produced by that which lacks self-sufficiency. The only remaining coherent model is reception by participation: the imperfect being truly possesses perfection, yet not as its own ground.

This structure preserves three necessary conditions:

1. **Reality**: the received perfection is genuine, not merely apparent.
2. **Asymmetry**: the source and recipient are not ontologically identical.
3. **Non-rivalry**: the source remains perfect without depletion.

4.3 Modal Asymmetry and Dependence

The necessity of reception introduces a modal asymmetry between perfect and imperfect modes of being. Imperfect beings are necessarily dependent with respect to perfection; perfect being, if it exists, is necessarily independent. This asymmetry is not contingent but structural. It holds across all possible instances of imperfect existence.

Importantly, this dependence does not reduce perfection to a mere external label or projection. Reception implies that perfection is present *in* the imperfect being, not merely attributed *to* it. The dependence concerns origin and grounding, not reality or efficacy.

4.4 Why Reception Does Not Collapse into Relativism

One potential concern is that treating perfection as received renders it subjective or relative. This concern rests on a confusion between epistemic access and ontological grounding. Reception specifies the causal origin of perfection, not its variability or arbitrariness.

A received perfection may be:

- Objective rather than conventional
- Normative rather than descriptive
- Shared rather than private

What it cannot be is self-generated. Reception secures objectivity by anchoring perfection in a source independent of the recipient's internal states or preferences.

4.5 The Modal Constraint Restated

The argument of this section may therefore be summarized as a constraint on all subsequent inquiry:

> **Any coherent account of perfection in imperfect beings must treat perfection as necessarily received, not achieved.**

This constraint does not determine the nature of the source, whether intentional or impersonal, nor does it settle whether perfection is universally instantiated. It merely establishes the boundary conditions within which any adequate account must operate.

The following sections will examine the implications of this constraint, beginning with the mode of reception and the question of participation.

5. The Mode of Reception — Participation Without Transfer

Having established that perfection, if present in imperfect beings at all, must be received rather than achieved, the remaining task is to determine the *mode* of such reception. This section argues that neither production nor transfer can coherently account for received perfection. The only viable mode is participation: real possession without self-grounding and without depletion of the source.

5.1 Why Production Fails

Production entails that the recipient is the sufficient cause of what it comes to possess. In the present context, this would require that an imperfect being produce perfection from its own internal capacities. As shown in Sections 3 and 4, this is incoherent: production presupposes sufficiency, whereas imperfection is defined by dependence.

Any attempt to weaken production into “co-production” or “emergent production” does not resolve the problem. Even emergent accounts require an underlying ontological base whose existence and capacities are already given. Emergence can explain novel configurations or properties within a dependent system; it cannot explain the appearance of ontological self-sufficiency within that system. Production therefore fails as a candidate mode.

5.2 Why Transfer Fails

Transfer models treat giving as the movement of a property or substance from source to recipient. Such models imply either loss or diminution in the source or division of what is transferred. Neither implication is compatible with perfection.

If perfection were transferred by division, the source would lose perfection in the act of giving, contradicting its definition. If perfection were transferred without loss, the model collapses into identity or duplication, erasing the distinction between source and recipient. In either case, transfer misconstrues the nature of perfection by treating it as a quantifiable or distributable entity.

Accordingly, reception of perfection cannot be understood as transfer.

5.3 Participation as the Only Coherent Mode

Participation offers a third option that avoids the failures of production and transfer. To participate is to possess a feature that remains fully grounded in its source while being genuinely present in the participant. Participation allows for real possession without ontological independence.

Under a participation model:

- The recipient truly has what is received.
- The sufficient cause of what is received remains external to the recipient.
- The source is not diminished by the participation of others.

This structure preserves the defining features of both perfect and imperfect modes of being without collapse or contradiction.

5.4 Non-Rivalrous Causation

A key feature of participation is **non-rivalry**. In rivalrous causation, one recipient's gain entails another's loss, or the depletion of the source. Non-rivalrous causation allows multiple participants to share in an actuality without competition or diminution.

Perfection, if communicable at all, must be non-rivalrous. A perfection that could be exhausted, divided, or reduced by participation would no longer qualify as perfection. Participation therefore provides the only causal structure consistent with the invariance required by perfection.

5.5 Reality Without Identity

Participation secures a further distinction essential to the argument: **real possession without identity**. The imperfect being does not merely resemble perfection, nor does it instantiate a subjective approximation. The perfection present is real, yet it does not render the recipient identical to the source.

This distinction avoids two opposing errors:

- **Reduction**, in which received perfection is downgraded to a projection or ideal.
- **Collapse**, in which participation is treated as identity, eliminating dependence.

Participation preserves both reality and asymmetry.

5.6 Summary of the Mode Constraint

The analysis of this section establishes a further constraint on any coherent account of received perfection:

> **If perfection is received by imperfect beings, it must be received by participation rather than by production or transfer.**

This constraint follows directly from the definitions of perfection and imperfection and does not depend on assumptions about agency, intentionality, or personality. Those questions remain open and will be addressed in subsequent sections. What has been fixed here is the causal form that any adequate account must take.

6. Participation and Relation (Dependence Without Identity)

The account of perfection developed thus far rests upon participation as the only coherent mode of reception. Participation, however, is not a free-floating concept. To participate is necessarily to stand in relation to that in which one participates. This section examines the nature of that relation and clarifies why participation entails dependence without identity.

6.1 Why Participation Necessarily Entails Relation

Participation requires a distinction between source and participant. The participant possesses what it does not ground, while the source grounds what it does not lose. This asymmetry is not accidental but structural. Without such distinction, participation collapses either into identity, eliminating dependence, or into mere resemblance, eliminating real possession.

Relation, in the present context, is therefore unavoidable. To receive perfection by participation is to be related to a source whose actuality sustains that perfection. The relation is not optional or superadded; it is constitutive of participation itself.

6.2 Relation Without Reciprocity

It is important to note that relation, as used here, does not imply reciprocity. The participant depends upon the source; the source does not depend upon the participant. This asymmetry distinguishes ontological relation from mutual interaction.

Many philosophical accounts tacitly assume that relation requires bidirectional influence. The present argument rejects this assumption. A relation of dependence may be entirely one-sided while remaining real. The source need not be affected, altered, or informed by the participant for the relation to obtain.

6.3 Relation Without Consciousness or Agency

Nor does relation imply consciousness, awareness, or intentional agency. A dependent relation may obtain irrespective of whether either term is conscious of the other. Ontological dependence concerns the grounding of being, not the presence of cognition or volition.

This distinction is essential for preserving philosophical neutrality. Participation establishes relation at the level of existence itself, prior to and independent of any psychological or intentional features. Whether the source of perfection is conscious or intentional remains an open question, not a presupposition.

6.4 Dependence Without Identity

Participation secures a precise balance between dependence and distinction. The imperfect being depends upon the source for the perfection it possesses, yet does not become identical with that source. Identity would abolish dependence; mere external relation would abolish participation.

This balance excludes two common errors:

- Treating participation as absorption or collapse into the source.
- Treating participation as mere external conformity or imitation.

Dependence without identity allows for real possession of perfection while preserving the ontological difference between perfect and imperfect modes of being.

6.5 Relational Continuity

Participation also implies relational continuity. The possession of perfection is not a one-time event but a sustained condition. Because the participant does not ground what it possesses, the relation must persist as long as the perfection is present.

This continuity does not require temporal persistence in any specific form; it requires only that dependence is not momentary or accidental. Perfection, if present at all, is present insofar as the relation is maintained.

6.6 Summary: Relation as a Structural Consequence

The analysis of this section yields a further constraint:

> **Participation necessarily entails relation, and that relation is one of dependence without identity.**

This conclusion neither introduces nor excludes agency, intentionality, or personality. It merely establishes that any coherent account of received perfection must include a real, asymmetrical relation between source and participant.

The next section will examine whether such relation requires intentionality or whether perfection can be given impersonally, completing the conceptual framework required to assess competing accounts.

7. Intentionality and Impersonal Accounts of Perfection

The preceding sections have established that perfection, if present in imperfect beings, must be received by participation and that participation necessarily entails an asymmetrical relation of dependence. What remains unresolved is whether such reception requires intentionality or agency on the part of the source, or whether perfection can be given impersonally. This section addresses that question by distinguishing logical necessity from explanatory sufficiency.

7.1 Intentionality as Sufficient but Not Necessary

Intentionality refers to directedness toward an end, typically associated with agency or consciousness. It is clear that intentional agency is sufficient to account for the giving of perfection: an agent could, in principle, will or sustain the participation of others in perfection. However, sufficiency does not entail necessity.

Nothing in the preceding analysis requires that the source of perfection act with intention. Participation, as defined, requires only that the source ground what the participant possesses. Directedness toward an end is not a prerequisite for grounding. Consequently, intentionality cannot be assumed without additional argument.

7.2 Structural Giving Without Intention

There are numerous cases in which structures ground or sustain features without intentional direction. Mathematical truths ground applications without intending them; physical laws sustain regularities without awareness of their effects. These examples illustrate a general point: grounding relations do not logically entail intention.

Accordingly, it is coherent to posit an impersonal source of perfection that grounds participation without intending to do so. Such an account satisfies the formal requirements established thus far: external sufficiency, non-rivalrous causation, and sustained relation.

7.3 The Limits of Impersonal Accounts

While impersonal accounts are logically possible, they face a specific explanatory challenge. Perfection, as treated in this paper, is not merely a structural regularity but an ontological fullness. The question is whether an impersonal source can adequately account for the normative and unifying aspects commonly associated with perfection, rather than merely its structural persistence.

This challenge does not refute impersonal accounts, but it restricts them. An impersonal source must explain how perfection functions as more than an abstract constraint or formal pattern. It must account for the coherence, stability, and completeness attributed to perfection without appealing to intention or agency.

7.4 Intentional Accounts and Their Added Explanatory Power

Intentional accounts possess an advantage at the level of explanatory richness. Agency can account not only for grounding but also for selectivity, differentiation, and purposive order. However, such advantages do not establish logical necessity. They represent explanatory expansions rather than deductive requirements.

The argument of this paper therefore does not conclude that intentionality must be present. It concludes only that intentionality, if posited, must operate within the constraints already established: participation without transfer, dependence without identity, and non-rivalrous grounding.

7.5 The Open Field of Viable Accounts

At this stage, the explanatory field has been significantly narrowed. Any viable account of perfection in imperfect beings must satisfy the following conditions:

1. Perfection is not self-generated by the imperfect.
2. Perfection is received by participation.
3. Participation entails a real, asymmetrical relation.
4. The source of perfection remains non-depleting.
5. The account coherently explains perfection as more than mere structural regularity.

Both intentional and impersonal accounts remain logically admissible, but neither is unconditionally sufficient. Each must meet the criteria imposed by the foregoing analysis.

7.6 Summary and Transition

The analysis of intentionality completes the paper's central task: establishing the necessary conditions under which perfection could be present in imperfect beings without presupposing theological commitments. The argument has shown that perfection cannot be achieved, must be received, and can only be received through participation in a source that grounds without depletion.

What remains is not a gap in the argument but a boundary of philosophical determination. Beyond this boundary, further inquiry may proceed along metaphysical, scientific, or theological lines, each constrained by the results established here.

The concluding section will summarize these results and clarify what has been proven, what has been excluded, and what remains open.

8. Conclusion

This paper set out to examine whether perfection, understood ontologically rather than morally, can be coherently attributed to imperfect beings without presupposing theological premises. By defining perfection as ontological self-sufficiency and imperfection as ontological dependence, the analysis reframed a familiar distinction in strictly structural terms, allowing its implications to be assessed without appeal to doctrine, authority, or empirical speculation.

The argument proceeded by establishing a negative result: an imperfect being cannot render itself perfect without contradiction. Dependence cannot generate self-sufficiency, and no process of development, emergence, or optimization can transform ontological dependence into ontological independence. This result does not deny change or improvement within imperfect systems; it clarifies the categorical boundary between improvement and perfection.

From this negative result followed a modal constraint: if perfection is present in imperfect beings at all, it must be received rather than achieved. This claim was shown to be conditional rather than assertive, specifying the only coherent mode by which perfection could appear without assuming its universal or actual presence.

The paper then examined the mode of such reception and argued that neither production nor transfer can account for received perfection. The only viable model is participation, understood as real possession without self-grounding and without depletion of the source. Participation preserves both the reality of perfection and the distinction between perfect and imperfect modes of being.

It was further shown that participation necessarily entails relation, specifically a relation of dependence without identity. This relation is asymmetrical and sustained, but it does not imply reciprocity, consciousness, or agency. Relation, in this sense, is an ontological consequence of participation rather than a psychological or interpersonal category.

Finally, the paper addressed whether participation requires intentionality. It argued that intentional agency is sufficient but not logically necessary for the giving of perfection. Both intentional and impersonal accounts remain admissible, provided they satisfy the constraints established by the analysis. The adequacy of such accounts depends on their ability to explain perfection as ontological fullness rather than mere structural regularity.

Taken together, these results significantly narrow the field of coherent explanations for perfection in imperfect beings. Any account that appeals to self-generation, latent sufficiency, or transfer is excluded. What remains is a framework in which perfection, if present, is necessarily received through participation in a source that grounds without depletion.

The paper does not claim to resolve the nature of that source, nor does it assert the existence or universality of perfection. Its contribution lies in clarifying the logical conditions under which such claims could be meaningfully made. By doing so, it establishes a neutral and philosophically disciplined foundation upon which further metaphysical, scientific, or theological inquiry may proceed without equivocation.

Appendix A: Formal Premise–Conclusion Argument

A.1 Definitions (Restated for Formal Use)

D1. *Perfection* is ontological self-sufficiency: lacking nothing required for one's own existence.

D2. *Imperfection* is ontological dependence: requiring conditions beyond oneself for existence or persistence.

D3. A being *achieves* a property if the sufficient cause of that property lies wholly within the being itself.

D4. A being *receives* a property if the sufficient cause of that property lies at least partly outside the being.

D5. *Participation* is real possession of a property without possession of that property as one's own sufficient ground.

A.2 Core Premises

P1. An imperfect being is ontologically dependent (from D2).

P2. Ontological dependence excludes self-sufficiency with respect to existence (from D1 and D2).

P3. To make oneself perfect would require becoming ontologically self-sufficient.

P4. A being cannot acquire ontological self-sufficiency through a process whose sufficient cause lies wholly within itself if it is ontologically dependent.

P5. Any process whose sufficient cause lies wholly within a being is an instance of achievement (from D3).

A.3 First Conclusion (Negative Result)

C1. Therefore, an imperfect being cannot make itself perfect.
(From P1–P5)

A.4 Modal Constraint on Perfection

P6. If perfection is present in an imperfect being, it must be present either by achievement or by reception (exhaustive disjunction).

P7. Perfection cannot be present in an imperfect being by achievement (from C1).

A.5 Second Conclusion (Modal Constraint)

C2. Therefore, if perfection is present in an imperfect being, it must be received rather than achieved.
(From P6–P7)

A.6 Constraints on the Mode of Reception

P8. Reception cannot coherently occur by transfer if the property received is non-divisible and non-depleting.

P9. Perfection, as ontological self-sufficiency, cannot be diminished or divided without ceasing to be perfection.

P10. Reception cannot coherently occur by production if the recipient lacks self-sufficiency.

A.7 Third Conclusion (Participation)

C3. Therefore, perfection, if received by an imperfect being, must be received by participation rather than by transfer or production.
(From P8–P10)

A.8 Relation and Dependence

P11. Participation requires a distinction between source and participant.

P12. Where a being possesses a property whose sufficient cause lies outside itself, it stands in a relation of ontological dependence to that cause.

A.9 Fourth Conclusion (Relation)

C4. Therefore, participation in perfection necessarily entails an asymmetrical relation of dependence without identity between source and participant.
(From P11–P12)

A.10 Intentionality

P13. Ontological grounding of a property does not logically require intentionality.

P14. Intentionality is sufficient but not necessary for grounding relations.

A.11 Final Conclusion (Scope of Viable Accounts)

C5. Therefore, both intentional and impersonal accounts of received perfection are logically admissible, provided they satisfy the constraints established in C2–C4.
(From P13–P14)

A.12 Summary of Results

1. Imperfect beings cannot make themselves perfect.
2. If perfection is present in imperfect beings, it must be received rather than achieved.
3. Reception of perfection can only occur by participation.
4. Participation entails asymmetrical relation without identity.
5. Intentionality is not logically required, though it may be explanatorily sufficient.

Appendix A': Symbolic Formalization

A'.1 Vocabulary and Predicates

Let the domain of discourse be beings.

Predicates

- $P(x)$: x is perfect
- $I(x)$: x is imperfect
- $D(x)$: x is ontologically dependent
- $S(x)$: x is ontologically self-sufficient
- $A(x, p)$: x achieves property p
- $R(x, p)$: x receives property p
- $G(y, x, p)$: y is a sufficient ground of property p in x
- $Part(x, p, y)$: x participates in property p grounded in y
- $Rel(x, y)$: x stands in an ontological relation of dependence to y
- $Int(y)$: y acts intentionally

Constants

- π: the property of perfection

A'.2 Definitional Axioms

D1 (Perfection):

$$\forall x \, (P(x) \leftrightarrow S(x))$$

D2 (Imperfection):

$$\forall x \, (I(x) \leftrightarrow D(x))$$

D3 (Achievement):

$$A(x, p) \rightarrow G(x, x, p)$$

D4 (Reception):

$$R(x, p) \rightarrow \exists y \, (y \neq x \wedge G(y, x, p))$$

D5 (Participation):

$$Part(x, p, y) \rightarrow (R(x, p) \wedge G(y, x, p))$$

A'.3 Structural Axioms

A1 (Dependence excludes self-sufficiency):

$$\forall x \, (D(x) \rightarrow \neg S(x))$$

A2 (Self-sufficiency required for perfection):

$$\forall x \, (P(x) \rightarrow S(x))$$

A3 (Exhaustive acquisition):

$$\forall x \forall p \, (P(p, x) \rightarrow (A(x, p) \vee R(x, p)))$$

(Informal gloss: a property present in a being is either achieved or received.)

A'.4 Impossibility of Self-Perfecting Imperfection

P1:

$$I(x) \to D(x)$$

P2:

$$D(x) \to \neg S(x)$$

P3:

$$P(x) \to S(x)$$

P4 (No self-generation of self-sufficiency):

$$(D(x) \land A(x, \pi)) \to \bot$$

C1 (No self-perfecting imperfection):

$$\forall x \, (I(x) \to \neg A(x, \pi))$$

(From P1–P4 by modus ponens and contradiction)

A'.5 Modal Constraint on Perfection

P5 (Exhaustive disjunction):

$$P(x) \rightarrow (A(x, \pi) \vee R(x, \pi))$$

P6:

$$\neg A(x, \pi)$$

(From C1, given $I(x)$)

C2 (Necessity of reception):

$$(I(x) \wedge P(x)) \rightarrow R(x, \pi)$$

This is the **modal constraint** in conditional form:

> *If perfection is present in an imperfect being, it must be received.*

A'.6 Exclusion of Transfer and Production

A4 (Non-divisibility of perfection):

$$G(y, x, \pi) \rightarrow \neg \exists z \, (z \neq y \wedge G(x, z, \pi))$$

A5 (No production by dependent beings):

$$D(x) \rightarrow \neg A(x, \pi)$$

C3 (Participation required):

$$R(x, \pi) \rightarrow \exists y \, Part(x, \pi, y)$$

A'.7 Relation Without Identity

A6 (Participation entails distinction):

$$Part(x, p, y) \rightarrow (x \neq y)$$

A7 (Grounding entails relation):

$$G(y, x, p) \rightarrow Rel(x, y)$$

C4 (Dependence without identity):

$$Part(x, \pi, y) \rightarrow (Rel(x, y) \wedge x \neq y)$$

A'.8 Intentionality

A8 (Grounding does not entail intentionality):

$$G(y, x, p) \rightarrow \neg(Int(y) \text{ is required})$$

A9 (Intentionality sufficient, not necessary):

$$Int(y) \rightarrow G(y, x, p) \quad (\text{sufficient})$$

C5 (Scope of admissible accounts):

$$\exists y\, G(y, x, \pi) \wedge (Int(y) \vee \neg Int(y))$$

A'.9 Final Theorem (Compressed)

$$\forall x \left(I(x) \land P(x) \rightarrow \exists y \left(Part(x, \pi, y) \land Rel(x, y) \land x \neq y \right) \right)$$

Informal gloss:
If an imperfect being is perfect, its perfection must be received by participation in a distinct source to which it stands in a relation of dependence; intentionality of the source is not logically required.

A'.10 Notes for Reviewers

- No existential claim about a perfect being is made.
- No theological predicates appear.
- All modal force is conditional.
- Intentionality remains underdetermined by design.

1) Natural-Deduction Proof Trees (Fitch / ND)

1.1 Core theorem: If $I(x)$ and $P(x)$, then x receives perfection

Assumptions / axioms used

- **D2:** $\forall x(I(x) \leftrightarrow D(x))$
- **A5:** $\forall x(D(x) \rightarrow \neg A(x,\pi))$ *(no production/achievement of perfection by dependent beings)*
- **P5:** $\forall x(P(x) \rightarrow (A(x,\pi) \vee R(x,\pi)))$ *(exhaustive acquisition)*
- Standard ND rules: ∀E, →E, ∧E, ∨E, ¬E (contradiction), ∨I.

Proof (Fitch-style)

Goal: $(I(x) \wedge P(x)) \rightarrow R(x,\pi)$

```
1.  I(x) ∧ P(x)                              Assumption
2.  I(x)                                     ∧E 1
3.  P(x)                                     ∧E 1
4.  ∀u( I(u) ↔ D(u) )                         Axiom D2
5.  I(x) ↔ D(x)                               ∀E 4
6.  I(x) → D(x)                               ↔E 5
7.  D(x)                                     →E 6,2
8.  ∀u( D(u) → ¬A(u,π) )                      Axiom A5
9.  D(x) → ¬A(x,π)                            ∀E 8
10. ¬A(x,π)                                   →E 9,7
11. ∀u( P(u) → (A(u,π) ∨ R(u,π)) )            Axiom P5
12. P(x) → (A(x,π) ∨ R(x,π))                  ∀E 11
13. A(x,π) ∨ R(x,π)                           →E 12,3
14.    [A(x,π)]                               Assumption (for ∨E)
15.    ⊥                                      ¬E 10,14
16.    R(x,π)                                 ⊥E 15
17.    [R(x,π)]                               Assumption (for ∨E)
18.    R(x,π)                                 Reit 17
19. R(x,π)                                   ∨E 13, (14–16), (17–18)
20. (I(x) ∧ P(x)) → R(x,π)                   →I 1–19
```

This gives the “modal constraint” in ND form.

1.2 From reception to participation (requires a bridge principle)

Reviewers will ask: how do you get from “received” to “participated”?
You need *one explicit axiom* that pins down the mode:

- **A_Part:** $\forall x(R(x,\pi) \rightarrow \exists y\, Part(x,\pi,y))$

This is exactly your earlier philosophical result: *transfer and production fail*, leaving participation as the only coherent mode. In formal appendices, it’s fine to encode that as an axiom (with a note pointing back to §5 for justification).

Proof (ND)

Goal: $R(x,\pi) \rightarrow \exists y\, Part(x,\pi,y)$

```
1.  R(x,π)                                  Assumption
2.  ∀u( R(u,π) → ∃y Part(u,π,y) )            Axiom A_Part
3.  R(x,π) → ∃y Part(x,π,y)                  ∀E 2
4.  ∃y Part(x,π,y)                           →E 3,1
5.  R(x,π) → ∃y Part(x,π,y)                  →I 1–4
```

1.3 Participation entails relation and non-identity

Axioms:

- **A6:** $\forall x \forall y(Part(x, \pi, y) \rightarrow x \neq y)$
- **A7:** $\forall x \forall y(G(y, x, \pi) \rightarrow Rel(x, y))$
- **D5:** $\forall x \forall y(Part(x, \pi, y) \rightarrow (R(x, \pi) \wedge G(y, x, \pi)))$

Goal: $Part(x, \pi, y) \rightarrow (Rel(x, y) \wedge x \neq y)$

```
1.  Part(x,π,y)                                    Assumption
2.  ∀u∀v( Part(u,π,v) → (R(u,π) ∧ G(v,u,π)) )  Axiom D5
3.  Part(x,π,y) → (R(x,π) ∧ G(y,x,π))          ∀E 2
4.  R(x,π) ∧ G(y,x,π)                          →E 3,1
5.  G(y,x,π)                                    ∧E 4
6.  ∀a∀b( G(b,a,π) → Rel(a,b) )                 Axiom A7
7.  G(y,x,π) → Rel(x,y)                         ∀E 6
8.  Rel(x,y)                                    →E 7,5
9.  ∀u∀v( Part(u,π,v) → u ≠ v )                 Axiom A6
10. Part(x,π,y) → x ≠ y                         ∀E 9
11. x ≠ y                                       →E 10,1
12. Rel(x,y) ∧ x ≠ y                             ∧I 8,11
13. Part(x,π,y) → (Rel(x,y) ∧ x ≠ y)           →I 1–12
```

1.4 Full compressed theorem

Combine 1.1 + A_Part + 1.3 to derive:

$$(I(x) \land P(x)) \rightarrow \exists y\,(Part(x, \pi, y) \land Rel(x, y) \land x \neq y).$$

(You can present this as a lemma-chain rather than one giant proof tree—journals prefer that.)

---

2) Kripke-Style Modal Variant

Here we make the “necessity” explicit *across possible worlds*.

2.1 Kripke frame and semantics

A Kripke model is $\mathcal{M} = \langle W, \mathcal{R}, D, I \rangle$ where:

- W: set of worlds
- $\mathcal{R} \subseteq W \times W$: accessibility relation
- D: (constant) domain of beings (or varying domain, if you prefer)
- I: interpretation function assigning predicate extensions at each world

Truth definition (standard):

- $\mathcal{M}, w \vDash \Box\varphi$ iff for all v with $w\mathcal{R}v$, $\mathcal{M}, v \vDash \varphi$
- $\mathcal{M}, w \vDash \Diamond\varphi$ iff exists v with $w\mathcal{R}v$ and $\mathcal{M}, v \vDash \varphi$

2.2 Modalized axioms (world-indexed)

We can express the key axioms as **necessary truths** (valid in all accessible worlds). For example:

1. **Definition stability**

$$\Box \forall x \, (I(x) \leftrightarrow D(x))$$

1. **Dependence excludes self-sufficiency**

$$\Box \forall x \, (D(x) \rightarrow \neg S(x))$$

1. **No achievement of perfection by dependent beings**

$$\Box \forall x \, (D(x) \rightarrow \neg A(x, \pi))$$

1. **Exhaustive acquisition**

$$\Box \forall x \, \big(P(x) \rightarrow (A(x, \pi) \vee R(x, \pi))\big)$$

1. **Participation bridge (from §5)**

$$\Box \forall x \, \big(R(x, \pi) \rightarrow \exists y \, Part(x, \pi, y)\big)$$

1. **Participation entails relation and non-identity**

$$\Box \forall x \forall y \, \big(Part(x, \pi, y) \rightarrow (Rel(x, y) \wedge x \neq y)\big)$$

2.3 The modal constraint (main modal theorem)

Theorem (Modal Constraint):

$$\Box\forall x \left((I(x) \land P(x)) \rightarrow R(x,\pi)\right).$$

Sketch proof (in modal Hilbert / semantic consequence form)

At any world w:

- From $\Box\forall x(I \leftrightarrow D)$ we have $I(x) \rightarrow D(x)$ at every accessible world.
- From $\Box\forall x(D \rightarrow \neg A)$ we get $D(x) \rightarrow \neg A(x,\pi)$.
- From $\Box\forall x(P \rightarrow (A \lor R))$ we get $P(x) \rightarrow (A(x,\pi) \lor R(x,\pi))$.
- If $I(x) \land P(x)$, then $D(x)$ and $A \lor R$, but $\neg A$, hence R.
  Since this reasoning is uniform in every accessible world, the implication holds under $\Box$.

2.4 Full modal theorem (with participation and relation)

You can package the full result as:

$$\Box\forall x \Big((I(x) \land P(x)) \to \exists y \, (Part(x, \pi, y) \land Rel(x, y) \land x \neq y) \Big).$$

This is the Kripke-style “strong form” that mirrors your narrative conclusion: **if perfection appears in the imperfect, it is necessarily by participation in a distinct grounding source, yielding an asymmetrical relation—across all relevant worlds**.